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Questions on Alaska

LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

OF THE

BOARD OF HOME MISSIONS AND THE WOMAN'S BOARD OF HOME MISSIONS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

No. 156 FIFTH AVENUE

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Questions on Alaska.

HYMN.

SCRIPTURE READING IN CONCERT.

For the Scripture saith, whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed. Rom. 10: 11.

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. Rom. 10: 12.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Rom. 10: 13.

How, then, shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? Rom. 10: 14.

And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written: How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things. Rom. 10: 15.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us. Acts 16: 9.

And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Acts 16: 10.

Prayer.—(1) That all of Christ's followers may be ready to heed the call. (2) For a blessing on the meeting.

(It is suggested that different leaders be appointed for various sections.)

SECTION 1.

ALASKA—ITS HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY.

Leader.—By what European nation was Alaska discovered?

All.—By the Russians; the sailors and fishermen of that nation, as early as 1741, passed from one of the Aleutian Islands to the next, and thus reached the mainland. Trading posts were established, but few settlements were made until about 1800.

Leader.—What was the condition of the natives under Russian rule?

All.—They were treated most cruelly and barbarously by the traders and by the convicts sent from Russia, ostensibly to teach them agriculture. Death was the punishment inflicted not only for crime, but for carelessness. for a misunderstanding, or even because of a whim of a Russian master. The native population was reduced one-half, and the term "white man" had a sound of dread to the unfortunate Alaskans, who had seen the manners of the conquerors of their land.

Leader.—Was no attempt made by the Russian Government to prevent the depredations committed by its subjects?

All.—An occasional report reaching the capital would call forth new edicts, but *European Russia* and *Russian America* were too far apart to insure the enforcement of these edicts.

Leader.—Did not the religious teachers interpose to save the nation?

All.—The Greek Church sent missionaries to Alaska; some of these were content to teach the Russians, others gave their time to trading, and only a few attempted to help the Alaskans. Those who did had much to overcome, owing to the influence of the white settlers.

Leader.—When did Alaska become the property of the United States?

All.—In 1867, when it was purchased from Russia for $7,200.000.

Leader.—What was the feeling in the United States concerning this purchase?

All.—It was generally regarded as a stupendous blunder, and Secretary of State William H. Seward, who had recommended it, was much blamed.

Leader.—What was the cause of this feeling?

All.—It was believed that Alaska had no resources which could be developed sufficiently to pay an interest on the purchase money.

Leader.—What changes took place in Alaska when the Stars and Stripes succeeded the Russian flag?

All.—The few Russian missionaries and the greater part of the white population withdrew. American traders, as dissolute and as unscrupulous as their predecessors, gave to the natives a bottle of rum for $200 worth of furs; in a word, Alaska was left without government, schools or churches.

Leader.—What does the name Alaska mean?

All.—The word Alaska means "The Great Land."

Leader.—Why does this name seem an appropriate one for the territory?

All.—Because Alaska is as large as all that part of the United States lying east of the Mississippi River and North of Georgia and Alabama.

Leader.—What can you tell of the coast line of Alaska?

All.—"The coast line, singularly indented, is twice as long as that of our Atlantic and Pacific seaboards combined; while, stretching as it does to the northwest toward Siberia, the most westerly of the Aleutian Islands is as far west of San Francisco as that city is west of Cape Cod."

Leader.—What are some of the natural features?

All.—The Yukon River, one of the largest in the world, is navigable for 3,000 miles; the mountains, lofty and imposing, contain both active and extinct volcanoes, while the glaciers are unsurpassed in grandeur.

Leader.—What of the climate of Alaska?

All.—Owing to the warm Japanese current the climate of the coast region is much more mild than in the interior, or in a corresponding latitude on the Atlantic coast.

Leader.—What of the rainfall in the southeastern district?

All.—It rains almost incessantly. Some years they have only 100 bright days out of the 365.

Leader.—What of the length of the summer days?

All.—During the summer there is no night. The sun sinks below the mountains at 9 P.M., and it is dark for about an hour at midnight, when the daylight again appears.

Leader.—What is the government of Alaska?

All.—Alaska was organized in 1885 as a civil district, with a governor, judge and other officers appointed by the President of the United States.

(NOTE.—If societies desire to follow this section with further study, see "Facts About Alaska," by Dr. Sheldon Jackson, and Map of Alaska, price five cents each.)

HYMN.

THE RESOURCES OF ALASKA.

Leader.—Has the purchase of Alaska proved to be as unprofitable as it was feared it might?

All.—No. The fur trade alone has returned to the United States Government the entire sum paid to Russia.

Leader.—Is there other wealth in Alaska besides that to be obtained from the fur trade?

All.—There are extensive deposits of gold, silver, marble, coal and copper; the forests, it has been said, could furnish timber for all the ships of the world for many years; and the salmon fisheries can compete successfully with those of any part of the world.

Leader.—Are any of these resources yet developed?

All.—Miners, lumbermen, fishermen and speculators are being attracted to Alaska. It is estimated that in the year '98 over $15,000,000 in gold was mined in the Yukon Valley.

Leader.—What has been done to increase the food supply in future years?

All.—Owing to the great destruction of the whale, walrus, seal and fish, upon which the natives depend for food, a successful attempt was made to introduce the domesticated reindeer of Siberia into northern Alaska. It is used for transportation, while clothing, tents, furniture and implements are made from its body.

(NOTE.—This section should be amplified by notes from the current secular press.)

Leader.—How large is the population of Alaska?

All.—It was estimated at about 30,000 natives and 10,000 whites, but the number of whites has largely increased since the discovery of gold in the Yukon Valley.

Leader.—Of what tribes is the native population composed?

All.—There are about 15,000 Innuit or Eskimo occupying the greater part of the coast line and the islands in the Arctic circle and southward to Mt. St. Elias; occupying the Aleutian Islands are 3,900 Aleuts and Creoles; inland along the course of the Yukon are 5,000 Tinneh; and scattered throughout southeastern Alaska are about 6,000 Thlinket, divided into ten classes, with remnants of other tribes.

Leader.—Do these tribes differ one from the other?

All.—Yes, very greatly. The Innuit are a large, muscular people, as are the Tinneh and Thlinket, whereas the Aleuts and Creoles are small of stature. The customs of the various tribes differ also, the Aleuts respecting the marriage relation, while the men of other tribes take and discard their wives at pleasure.

Leader.—What is the general character of the Alaskan tribes which have not been influenced by the white man?

All.—They are good-natured, bold and self-reliant. They never steal from a guest. An unguarded house is respected, and a deer may with safety be left hanging on a tree. Family honor and clan pride are the strongest influences in their life, and to meet the demand of these they will make any sacrifice.

Leader.—What is peculiar in the family relationship?

All.—All descent is traced through the mother. Hence a mother's brother has the control of her children rather than their father.

Leader.—What are the homes of the Alaskans?

All.—Those in the north have circular mounds of earth, covered with grass, but most of those in the southeast live in communal houses or tents.

Leader.—What is their religious belief?

All.—They believe in a multitude of spirits, and in a power that rewards good and evil by sending them to different places after death. They believe in witchcraft and in its name have practiced horrible cruelties.

(NOTE.—For further reading on the subject of this section, see "Facts About Alaska.")

HYMN.

SCHOOL AND MISSION WORK IN ALASKA.

Leader.—Was mission work begun in Alaska immediately after the purchase by the United States?

All.—No. Though Alaska became a part of the United States in 1867 little or nothing was done during the next ten years to establish either schools or churches there, and the natives were utterly neglected.

Leader.—When was a public school system organized?

All.—In 1885 a small appropriation was made by Congress for this purpose, but owing to the distances between the small settlements and the large number of schools therefore needed, the amount was not sufficient to meet the needs of the people.

Leader.—What were some of the regulations governing the school work?

All.—The supervision of the school work in Alaska was to be under the care of a General Agent, appointed by the Commissioner of Education; at least one school was to be established in every tribe; local school committees were to be appointed, and as far as possible the agent was to visit each school district once in two years. His report was to include public, contract, private and mission schools. The English language alone was to be taught, and the United States flag was to be raised each morning, that the pupils might learn their relation to the Government.

Leader.—Who was chosen as General Agent for school work in Alaska?

All.—Dr. Sheldon Jackson, whose name is inseparably connected with school and mission work in Alaska.

Leader.—What denominations have undertaken mission work in Alaska?

All.—The Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal, Congregational, Moravian, Swedish, Evangelical, Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic. Some of these, however, have but one station.

Leader.—When was the first Presbyterian Mission established in Alaska?

All.—In 1877, when Rev. Dr. Sheldon Jackson opened a school among the Stikine tribe at Fort Wrangel, placing Mrs. A. R. McFarland in charge.

Leader.—How has this work developed?

All.—The Woman's Board has at present under its care a large and well-equipped school at Sitka; it makes provision also for the evangelistic work carried on at Sitka, Fort Wrangel, Jackson, Hoonah, Chilkat, Skagway, Juneau, Saxman, St. Lawrence Island, and Point Barrow.

Leader.—What does the industrial plant at Sitka comprise?

All.—It includes a girls' home, a boys' home, a native church, industrial shops, two hospital buildings, the Sheldon Jackson Museum and a number of model cottages.

Leader.—How many pupils are in attendance?

All.—The school accommodates from 150 to 200 pupils. Beside Bible and class-room instruction, the girls are trained in sewing and the work of the household; the boys are taught carpentry, shoemaking, coopering and other industries.

Leader.—What has been the result of work in this institution?

All.—Many who have received Christian training at this school are now a power for good among their own people.

Leader.—What of the work at Point Barrow and St. Lawrence Island?

All.—These are peculiarly isolated points, where communication with the outside world can be had only once or twice a year. Gratifying results have been attained along both educational and evangelistic lines.

Leader.—What encouraging feature in regard to the work at Saxman?

All.—It is under the care of Rev. Edward Marsden, the first ordained native missionary. Thus in a period of twenty years Alaska sees one of her own children a Christian pastor among his people.

(NOTE.—In connection with this section, read selections from following leaflets: "Chilkat George" (1c.); "The Sitka Training School" (5c.); "Our Northernmost Possessions" (2c.). See also Home Mission Monthly for June (5c.).

Price, 2 cents each; $1.50 per 100.

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